



# DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

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## DR. COGGAN REFLECTS ON YEARS AS ARCHBISHOP

LONDON, -- The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. and Rt. Honorable Donald Coggan, in his farewell press conference said that the greatest challenge facing the church today is "not to be inward looking, but to be outward reaching."

Flanked by portraits of some of his predecessors in the stately Guard Room of Lambeth Palace, he spoke candidly of his time as the 101st Archbishop of Canterbury to a capacity audience.

Dr. Coggan, who retired on January 25 -- exactly 24 years since his consecration as Bishop of Bradford in 1956 -- went on: "The danger facing the Church of England and in fact all Christians, is that we should be so concerned with our own preoccupations that we forget that our primary task is first to worship and second to evangelize."

"Another danger is for activism to take the place of worship and devotion."

He said he believed that the church today was "in much better heart" than it had been for some years. "There are many signs of an upsurge of new life."

Characteristically he shied away from questions about what he felt to be his greatest achievements. He steered the discussion to the pastoral side of his work, speaking with enthusiasm about contact with ordinary people and visits to out of the way places like a country church in his own diocese where "you felt that Heaven had almost come to earth."

His main disappointments were that there had not been "quicker progress in the field of unity negotiations and the ordination of women."

"One of the saddest days of my life was when the scheme for union with the Methodists broke down."

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He said his goal had been to work for unity with all churches. "People get the impression that the Anglican Church is only interested in union with Rome. That is because when one talks of Rome, the cameras click on." He commended the work of the Churches' Council for Covenanting, saying that "after the breakdown with the Methodists, I would hate to see another setback."

What is his assessment of Pope John Paul II, the apparent trend towards conservatism under him and its implications for unity?

"It would be rash to make predictions. But we have a man with a big heart and a keen brain who in the coming months and years will have the opportunity to see at first hand the caliber of the leaders of other parts of the church -- something which has not been possible from a country like Poland in previous decades."

What of the Coggan "image?"

"When I was appointed someone called me a 'caretaker archbishop.' I was delighted. There is no more important job than to be a caretaker in the church of God.

"Sometimes I have been criticized for a certain naivité of presentation. My own view is that the pulpit is not the place for exposing one's doubts. It is for strengthening those to whom one preaches.

"The place for expressing one's doubts -- and who of us hasn't got them -- is the study circle, the group.

"Sometimes what is apparent naivité -- which no doubt I have a great deal of -- is in fact an attempt to penetrate to the heart of a problem and peel away some of the encumbering externals."

What does he make of Anglican diversity?

"I do come from a wing of the Church of England called 'evangelical' -- in my view a positive word with an insistence on the gospel. I believe that part of the richness of the Church of England is its ability to encompass all three wings as well as other emphases such as the charismatic movement.

"I have always sought to be fair to the other wings -- the so-called 'high' church (I always insist in calling myself a 'high churchman,' having read the New Testament," he added with a twinkle) "and the broad church which insists on freedom of thought and expression.





"Our diversity had its great dangers I have no doubt. But on the whole it's a great stance and long may it continue."

Enlarging on his warning about the re-emergence of party strife in his final message to the Church of England General Synod, he said: "If a synod is to be what a Synod means -- a way together -- it surely must be that you cannot vote on party lines. You must come with an open mind and be prepared to change your view in the course of debate." He added that a lot could be learned from the church in Africa where participants patiently mull over issues "until a common mind is reached."

He spoke of "doing his little bit" trying to secure human rights in places like the Soviet Union, South Africa and Chile. "The problem is so vast. Looking back I wish I could have done more."

Plans for retirement include travel -- he will visit Thailand, South India and the U.S.A. later in the year -- catching up on a backlog of reading and the pleasure of being a member of a village community. He said that he relished the thought of spending more time with his wife and "joint work at a relaxed pace instead of a furious pace."

"The joy of being a priest is that your job never finishes until they carry you out. Even then you begin again somewhere else."

Does he have any advice for his successor?

"I think that any wise man is very wary of giving advice to his successor. I know Bishop Runcie well and appreciate very highly his gifts. I'm not going to breathe down his neck. I shall rarely write to The Times and even less to the Church Times."

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